The Th.D. dissertation is expected to be a mature and competent piece of writing, embodying the results of significant and original research. It must demonstrate the student’s ability to contribute to scholarly discourse and to bring that discourse to bear on the ministries and practices of Christian communities. At a minimum, every Th.D. dissertation should include reflection on implications of its central theme for some concrete practice(s) of Christian communities. Ideally, consideration of such practices will inform the work throughout, serving as a stimulus for the study and as one of the “texts” being probed in the investigation.

**DISSERTATION COMMITTEE**

In consultation with their principal advisor, students designate a dissertation committee after passing preliminary examinations.

- This committee does not need to be identical with a student’s preliminary examination committee.
- It must be composed of four or five members, at least three of whom are members of Duke Divinity School.
- The chair of the dissertation committee (who serves as supervisor for the dissertation) must be in the student’s primary area of concentration, but may be a change from their prior principal advisor. In some cases it may be advisable to have co-chairs.
- The proposed committee roster must be reported to the Th.D. director for approval.

**DISSERTATION PROPOSAL**

Students are expected to prepare and defend a dissertation proposal by the end of the semester following the passing of their preliminary examinations.

- Students work most closely with their dissertation supervisor in preparing the proposal.
- The proposal should be limited to 10–12 pages and include:
  a. A tentative title.
  b. A statement of the problem to which the dissertation will be addressed and indication of foreign language competencies required for the research.
  c. A brief statement justifying the topic on the basis of both its significance and its feasibility.
  d. A brief statement regarding the methodology.
  e. A tentative outline.
  f. A basic bibliography.
- In consultation with the other members of the dissertation committee, a student’s supervisor will confirm when the proposal is ready for defense, reporting this to the Th.D. director.
- The student will work with the Th.D. staff assistant in scheduling the oral defense of the proposal.
- At least three members of the dissertation committee must be present at the defense to discuss the proposal with the student and approve it. Other members may provide input through the dissertation supervisor.
- The dissertation supervisor will submit the formal approval of a proposal, along with a copy of the final proposal, to the Th.D. director.
- If a student for any reason should significantly change his/her proposal from the one
originally approved, the above steps must be repeated for the new proposal.

PREPARATION OF DISSERTATION
Ordinarily the writing of a dissertation should take between one and two years. It must be completed within four years of finishing one’s preliminary exams, or the Th.D. Oversight Committee may require retaking the exams. The final version should be between 80,000 and 100,000 words in length, including notes and bibliography. For information about the format of the dissertation see the Th.D. Dissertation Style Guide.

- Students develop the first draft of the dissertation in consultation with their supervisor.
- In this process, individual chapters or portions thereof can be submitted to other members of the dissertation committee, as appropriate. (Discussion of which materials to circulate in this broader manner is encouraged as part of the defense of the dissertation proposal.)
- Drawing on the suggestions of the supervisor and other readers, a student next revises the first draft of all chapters, preparing a penultimate draft of the dissertation.
- The student must give their supervisor four weeks to review this penultimate draft. The supervisor may decide: a) that the dissertation is ready for defense, b) that the dissertation requires some minor revisions, or c) that it needs more substantial revision. If substantial revision is required, the supervisor may suggest that it be looked at in part or in full by one or more of the other readers. If revisions are required, the student will make them and then resubmit the dissertation. The same options will be available to the supervisor.
- When the supervisor decides that a dissertation is ready for defense, the student will work with the Th.D. staff assistant in setting the defense date. The date selected must provide at least three weeks between submission of the defense copy to the dissertation committee and the oral defense.
- The student should submit a pdf copy of the final draft of the dissertation to each member of his or her committee and to the Director of the Th.D. Program. Members of the committee should be informed that they can request the Director of the Th.D. Program to arrange for a print version, if that is their preference.
- Students are reminded to “Apply to Graduate” through the Office of Academic Formation and Programs by the appropriate deadline in the semester that they intend to defend their dissertation.

DISSERTATION DEFENSE
The oral defense of a dissertation usually lasts two hours. All members of the dissertation committee, including the chair, must be present at the defense or participate by conference call. Other DDS faculty and Th.D. students may attend, with the permission of the student defending and his/her committee chair.

- The completed dissertation and the oral defense must be approved by the dissertation committee chair; all but one of the other members of the committee also must approve.
- A report form recording the decision of the committee will be conveyed to the Th.D. director by the chair of the committee, regardless of the outcome.
- If the decision is positive, committee members will sign an original copy of both the Dissertation Title signature page and the Dissertation Abstract Title signature page. The student will have responsibility for submitting these pages with the final draft of the dissertation.

*Updated March 31, 2011*